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COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
313 N. Figueroa, Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 240-8101

February 20, 2004

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.
Director and Chief Medical Officer

Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **HOUSING INSPECTION PROGRAM**

On November 25, 2003, the Board approved several motions, concerning the Department of Health Services (DHS) housing inspection program. This is to provide you with an update on our actions since our January 13, 2004, memo.

MAKING INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE

As previously described, two years of data from routine inspections are now available on the Department's website. The remaining item to promote the accessibility of rental housing information on the web is the posting of results from complaint inspections on the website. The testing of the programming changes to the Environmental Health information systems have resulted in the need for further reconfiguration and reprogramming to overcome some discrepancies. As a result, our revised target date to start making complaint information available on the website is February 27, 2004. The website database will only include complaint inspections from the inception of the new system forward.

County Counsel has completed the final draft of the ordinance that will require landlords to post signs informing tenants where and how to file complaints and also letting them know that inspection reports are available from the Department. Within the next two weeks, the ordinance will be filed for Board consideration.

We previously reported that informational documents about housing issues were being developed or revised. After further review, given the number of enhancements being made to the Department's housing inspection program, a comprehensive informational booklet will be developed. In the meantime, brochure and information sheets on lead, mold, and tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities are available on the Department's website.

IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INSPECTIONS

In order to increase the likelihood that tenants will be present during an inspection, County Counsel has prepared an ordinance change that, if approved, would permit inspections from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. (currently 8:00 a.m. to dusk). This proposed ordinance change will also be filed within the next two weeks.

Department Environmental Health staff completed a review of the housing codes of seven large U.S. cities and counties. A comparison of these codes with LA County's identified tenant responsibility as an area in which our codes could be strengthened. We will work with County Counsel to explore this issue further.

TRACKING INSPECTIONS AND COMPLIANCE

The interim complaint-tracking system became operational on February 2, 2004. Procedures were established to capture data, staff were trained to input data, and the web-based application was incorporated into the Department's intranet for accessibility to all district offices. This tracking system will remain operational until the eDAPTS multi-department property abatement system is implemented.

ENFORCEMENT

At the Department's request, County Counsel drafted a proposed process for administrative hearings and administrative fines for the housing inspection program. As a result of our review of the proposed administrative hearing and fine process we have determined that extensive resources would be needed to hold such hearings; Therefore we are recommending that this proposal be put aside until we see the effectiveness of other housing inspection improvements. We believe that the reinspection fee proposal, which we will bring to the Board with the annual permit and fee package, provides greater economic incentives for compliance by recalcitrant landlords, without imposing significant new for implementation costs.

A meeting was scheduled for February 19, 2004, to which all 88 city attorneys and the District Attorney have been invited. The meeting identified areas for improved collaboration and develop protocols that will facilitate timely and effective administrative action and prosecution of rental housing cases.

SUMMARY

To summarize, the Department and County Counsel will return to your Board with an ordinance for your approval that will 1) require posting of placards with information about complaints and inspection results, and 2) change the hours allowable for inspections. Full implementation Countywide will require the adoption of the ordinance by the cities.

We will provide you with a further update on our remaining actions by March 15, 2004. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need additional information, please let us know.

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c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Auditor-Controller